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Preschool Teachers and the Selection of Lullabies in Activities with Preschool Children²

Extended summary

Lullaby, as a literary form that is multifunctional for children - in terms of cognitive, emotional and social development, development of speech, perception and attention, stimulating curiosity and interest, and developing creativity - is an important element in achieving educational goals in the context of various aspects of child development.

In this paper the authors examine the experience of preschool teachers (N = 302) with: (a) the selection of lullabies; (b) the selection of folk and artistic lullabies; (c) opting for vocal, instrumental, i.e., vocal-instrumental lullabies in their work with the youngest children. The aim of the paper was to examine whether and how the preschool teachers' work experience and professional education influence their selection of lullabies and to understand the potential patterns of selection of this particular literary form in order to contribute to the methodological education of the preschool teachers.

The research results indicate that the selection of the lullabies is not particularly varied, which is not surprising, given that the teachers did not get any significant support from anthologists and historians of Serbian literature for children. According to the teachers' experience, 11 titles are predominant in the corpus of the lullabies for preschool children, which is expected, bearing in mind that this literary form is available in a small number of sources. The re-

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spondents were asked in the questionnaire to cite a text or a part of the text of a lullaby. A little over a half of the respondents did that (154 or 54.6%), while the others provided the content of other literary forms, such as poems, fairy tales, etc. Some arguments supporting this selection of the content can be: similarities with the lullabies in terms of language or rhythmic characteristics (lyrical poems, etc.); their popularity as a means for putting children to sleep (fairy tales and stories); children's interest in the age 4-8 (fairy tales). On the other hand, the texts of the lullabies written by different authors are mainly incorporated in the collections of poems, which means that their selection depends on the preschool teacher. It is therefore understandable that the texts of the lullabies that do not correspond to the original form of this genre found their way in the teachers' responses.

The research findings indicate the need for a more diverse selection of lullabies in working with preschool children. Also, given the importance of this literary form for child development, more attention should be paid to the methodological study of the usage of the lullabies in educational work, regardless of the fact that it is debatable to what extent this work is planned and realized in accordance with empirical findings and scientific and professional considerations. The problem of connecting the research results with practical work in a preschool institution cannot be attributed only to preschool teachers, but to a certain extent also to researchers, and, above all, to the creators of educational policies.

Two thirds of the surveyed preschool teachers have cited the text of the authors' lullabies, and one third the text of the traditional folk lullabies that represent the content of activities with preschoolers. Despite the fact that the lullabies written by different authors are less accessible to teachers than traditional lullabies, and that they are more difficult to recognize in the corpus of written literature, it is important that both types are represented in activities with children, given their primarily calming effect with a potentially ritual layer on the one hand, as well as the orientation towards the child as a recipient, on the other hand.

When it comes to the choice of the lullabies that are available with musical accompaniment, the largest percentage of respondents (113 or 70.2%) cite the lullabies that are available in the form of vocal-instrumental compositions. However, in order to create a developmentally stimulating environment, preschool teachers should enable children to get acquainted with different musical contents - vocal, instrumental and vocal-instrumental - especially having in mind their openness to a diverse musical repertoire. The teachers' experiences regarding the choice of the lullabies, then with the choice of the folk and authored lullabies, as well as the lullabies with or without instrumental accompaniment, do not differ significantly depending on education and work experience, which may indicate the lack of the teachers' awareness of the importance of this literary form in their work with children, which in turn is a consequence of an insufficient study of this genre from a methodological point of view.

The empirical findings bring forth the problem of selecting the content for working with the youngest children, i.e., they open many questions – from the availability of various sources of appropriate literary texts supported by theoretical and methodological interpretations, to the ability of the preschool teachers to mould the children's literary taste, and finally to the question of the responsibility of the creators of educational policies who, according to the latest Preschool Education Program, leave the choice of the content for activities with preschool

children entirely to preschool teachers, despite the complexity of this task and the professional criticism of such practice.

The obtained results show that, despite many difficulties, preschool teachers observe the literary-scientific and methodological principles in their selection of the lullabies for working with the preschool children. However, they need a systemic support to be able to respond adequately to the educational requirements for working with the youngest population.

Keywords: preschool teachers, lullaby, activities with preschool children, methodological education of preschool teachers.

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